



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ERASMUS: A HUMANIST AMONG REFORMERS

When Petrarch, after many efforts, succeeded in obtaining from Constantinople certain manuscripts of Homer and Plato, he held them reverently in his hands and contemplated them longingly; then, bending his head over them, he kissed them and sighed over them. He had not the Greek to read them; but there in those unfamiliar characters were the songs of Homer, and the thoughts of the divine Plato; and he loved them, although, as he said, they were dumb to him, and he was deaf to them. Those kisses of homage were symbolic. Petrarch acted as the leader and representative of the goodly company of which he was the first: those true children of the Renaissance whom we call the Humanists. For the Humanists loved learning, as the Greeks loved beauty, for its own sake, and scorned to assume any attitude of apology for their devotion. To the questions that were hurled at them—as they are hurled at their successors—as to the utility of such studies, they returned only a disdainful silence, for the utilitarian could not possibly understand such an answer as alone the Humanists would give.

The Revival of Learning, which was the most conspicuous and most important feature of the Renaissance, dawned upon Europe like a rising sun, and men who had been walking in intellectual darkness looked about them and saw glories and beauties all new to them, although they were dimly aware of their existence. The Church and the schools were overlaid with the corruptions of the Dark Ages. The clergy, the lawyers and the doctors spoke a rough and ready Latin, full of barbarous words and rude syntax, in which the grace and majesty of the Roman tongue were lost. The great authors of Rome were practically unread. The Greek language was forgotten, and well-nigh lost. The European tongues were obscured with dialectic corruptions, and, with the exception of the Italian, were as yet immature; and this dog-Latin was the only means of communication among the student class. The great philosophies of the ancient days had given way to the fantastic jargon of the schoolmen, with their endless disputations over crazy trifles. Still, there was a

stirring of the human intellect in progress, and the world was waiting for the torch which should be at once signal and guide. It is not our purpose, however, to dwell at any length upon that mighty outbreak which we call the Renaissance, but only to touch upon one side of the life of one of its truest children.

The Revival of Learning began with Petrarch. On one memorable day he was led to open the pages of a manuscript of Cicero, and he read with wonder. The majestic march of the stately sentences, the gracious dignity of the style, the weighty orations, the leisurely essays, the graceful letters, the atmosphere of the very finest culture of the great days of Rome, all enchanted the Italian poet. Surely some of the lost glory of the ancient time could be brought back by study and labor! And to bring it back became one of the passions of Petrarch's life. The torch was lighted now, and passed swiftly from hand to hand. Associations of students sprang up in Italy, notably in Rome, Florence and Venice. The manuscripts of the classics were sought out with ardor and studied with avidity. Scholars went to work with passion to purge out the barbarisms which had been suffered to defile their common tongue. The more thoroughgoing among them cherished an ambition to use no word which had not the sanction of some writer of the Golden Age of Latin literature. Some of them, like Cardinal Bembo, went so far as to eschew every word that was not to be found in Cicero. The Latin of European scholars began to lose its degenerate coarseness, and to take on a Roman shape, until it became, in some hands, a language with which Cicero himself would have found little fault.

Along with the revival of Latin came in the study of Greek. That golden tongue had faded out of men's minds. In no European university was there such a thing as a course in Greek. When students in the classroom came across a Greek word, or a line of Greek, they would pass it over with the formula; "*Græcum est; legi non potest*". But now there was a rush to learn it. Boccaccio, the disciple of Petrarch, seems to have been the first European scholar to acquire what might be called a working knowledge of the language, and succeeded in producing a Latin translation of the *Iliad*. Coluccio Salutati, the Florentine Chancellor of

State, who was such a good Latinist that his official reports were copied and studied as models, brought to Europe the first competent teacher of Greek, Manuel Chrysoloras; and later on the learned John Argyropoulos came to Italy, and became the teacher of Lorenzo di Medici, Politian, and Johann Reuchlin, of which last-named scholar more anon. To the Humanists the revelation of Greek literature was a vision of glory and beauty. Here broke upon them the rush and lilt of the *Iliad*, the surge and thunder of the *Odyssey*, the power and passion of Æschylus, the grace and depth of Sophocles, the dramatic maturity and perfection of Euripides, the fiery sweetness of Sappho and the undying charm of Theocritus. Here was Aristotle, master of minds, complete in his all-embracing treatises, and no longer requiring to be studied in rude and fragmentary Latin translations. And, above all, here was the incomparable Plato, with his lofty imaginings, his noble aspirations, his sweet Hellenic sanity. All the honey of Hymettus was before the amazed and delighted eyes of those who by acquiring the Greek tongue were able to sip its sweets. And the Humanists plunged delightedly into these delectable studies. So proficient became many scholars, even among the non-professional classes, that the syndics of the Aldine press, under the leadership of Paulus Manutius, transacted all the business of their publishing house in Greek. This rapid proficiency throws an interesting light upon the popular impression that Greek is an excessively difficult language. The theory that such is the case I believe to be a schoolboy tradition taking its rise from the novelty of the characters to an eye accustomed only to Roman letters. The Greek verb has as few irrationalities as any of the Indo-European languages, although we may admit that that is not saying a great deal; its declined article adds greatly to the ease with which its sentences are understood; its system of particles makes it an instrument of the most delicate precision. In fact, it may be doubted whether it is as difficult a language as Latin. And yet, strange to say, by the middle of the sixteenth century it had begun to die out again!

The golden tongue has often been threatened since, and an angry cloud has more than once gathered about it. But may Apollo and the Nine avert the day when our schools shall again

echo that complacent formula of contented ignorance : "Græcum est; legi non potest".

In the midst of the Humanist band stands out one man, a single side of whose many-sided life we propose to consider. He was born at Rotterdam in 1467. His patronymic was Gierhard : in Latin, Desiderius; in Greek, Erasmus. And the Latin and Greek appellations, together with the local designation, Roterodamus, became his name for all the years of his adult life. He was perhaps no better a Latinist than Politian; he was perhaps not so great a Grecian as Budæus or Reuchlin; but the fertility of his mind, the brilliancy of his wit, and the charm of his personality, have fairly won for him the royal crown among the Humanists. Never since the ninth century, at least, had Latin been less of a dead language than it was in the hands of Erasmus. Easy, racy, sparkling, the ancient tongue slipped from his pen with a facile grace. He himself said that he could write in no other language. His native Flemish, of course, he must have spoken. Froude conjectures that he must have known French and German. But he tells us himself that he could not speak French; he was unable to read two of Luther's German books which were sent to him; and he declined a parish in England which Archbishop Warham had offered him, because he could not preach in English. Latin was the language in which he thought and wrote and spoke. To say that he was not always classical is to utter an obvious truism. New things had to have new names. Ultra-classicists like Bembo and Sadoletto, who refused to use any but Ciceronian words, had to confine their published work to ancient themes. The most accomplished of modern Latinists, although the veriest of purists, could not say in classical language that he was going to telephone for a taxicab to take him to the railway station. And so a man like Erasmus, who wrote on such a wide range of subjects, had to use some words at which Quintilian would have shuddered, although he often contrives by a bit of clever and amusing paraphrasing to avoid verbal atrocities which might wound the ears of his more sensitive friends. Some jealous Florentines dubbed him *Porrophagus*, on account of his alleged fondness for the word *porro*. I have not thought it worth while

to search through the pages of Erasmus to ascertain whether this charge is well founded or not, but I am very certain that if Erasmus wrote *porro* very often, it was because *porro* was the word which most exactly expressed his meaning. He threw himself into the study of Greek with delighted ardor, and fairly revelled in it. He studied Greek poetry, plays and philosophy ; he read the Greek Fathers ; he translated Plutarch, and he translated Lucian,—this latter with a particular relish, we may imagine, for Lucian's was a mind kindred to his own. Circumstances had forced him into the Church, and had even made an Augustinian monk of him, but at heart he was neither monk nor priest, any more than Petrarch was. He was a man of letters, first and last, of delicate health and fastidious tastes. The life of a monastery was intolerable to him. The long daily offices bored him, and took him away from his beloved studies. His fellow-monks exasperated him by their coarse talk and their conceited ignorance. The perfunctory and conventional mortifications of the flesh which formed part of the monastic routine only irritated him. He could scarcely eat fish at all, and if the fish were salt, he could not endure even the smell of it. His heart, he said, was Catholic, but his stomach was Lutheran. Fasting gave him violent dyspepsia, and in later years he could drink only one kind of wine. To his monastic brethren, he writes, fasting was easy, for they were like vultures,—stuff them full one day, and they could hold out over the next. At last his Prior took pity on him, and asked the Bishop of Cambray to engage Erasmus as his secretary, and for that purpose to procure for him from the Pope a dispensation for non-residence. In time the Bishop permitted him to go to the University of Paris, where he plunged into study and into society, both learned and frivolous.

Erasmus was now in his element. The charm of his talk, the sparkle of his wit, and the gaiety of his disposition, soon made him the centre of the most brilliant coterie of the University. The authorities of the institution rather shook their heads over the coruscations of this new meteor which had blazed up in their sky, but readily recognized the fact that a man of genius was among them. A severe illness checked his career in Paris, and on his re-

covery he formed the design of going to Bologna to take his doctor's degree, and then proceeding to Rome, to study in the great libraries. This plan he could not carry out, but he followed a course which proved to be of much greater importance to him. His English pupil, Lord Mountjoy, took him to England, where he formed the most memorable and delightful friendships of his life. He was charmed with England, the climate, the scholars, and the girls, of which last attraction he wrote a merry account to his friend Faustus Andrelinus. Of the scholars he writes:—

“They know their classics so accurately that I have lost but little in not going to Italy. When Colet speaks, I might be listening to Plato. Linacre is as deep and accurate a thinker as I have ever met with. Grocyn is a mine of knowledge; and Nature never formed a sweeter and happier disposition than that of Thomas More.”

This last-mentioned friendship with one of the choicest specimens of wisdom and virtue that the English race has produced, was perhaps the longest continued and deepest of Erasmus's life. From the day when he first met Sir Thomas More to the day of the foul judicial murder of the great Chancellor by Henry VIII, the reciprocal devotion of the two men never waned.

We have now to notice, since it is essential to our purpose, a characteristic of the Renaissance—perhaps its most conspicuous feature: what we may call, for want of a better word, its paganism. When the minds of the Humanists went back to the golden age of classic letters, and saw the fruit of the free and joyous days when no authority sought to fasten fetters upon the human mind: when they contrasted the glory that was Greece, and the grandeur that was Rome with the spectacle of a world just out of the Dark Ages, where the rack and the stake awaited those who sought to lighten its darkness: where a corrupted Church watched with sullen suspicion for any signs of a chain to intellectual freedom: where the small company of educated men devoted itself to the study and discussion of unspeakable trivialities: it was no wonder that the hearts of the Humanists turned back to the days of the palm and the pæan, to the land of the poets, where the earth was fair under the glance of the sun-god, and where the flowers bloomed along the

footsteps of the goddess who was born of the ocean's foam; where Apollo drove his flaming chariot across the mid-day sky, and Cynthia rode in her silver car over the vault of the night; where the ear of the wanderer in the forest caught the light step of a dryad slipping out of sight among the trees, or recognized the ripple of a hidden brook as the soft voice of a nymph. Do we wax florid? Doubtless, but so sang and so spoke the Humanists. Vergil and Theocritus and Ovid were mellow-sweet indeed to ears accustomed to the jangle of the schools, where—

“ . . . they slashed and hammered about
Dry husks of logic, old scraps of creed,
And the cold gray dreams of doubt.

“As, whether ‘Just’ or ‘Justified’
Was the Church’s mystic Head,
And whether the Bread was changed to God,
Or God became the Bread.”

Certainly the mixture of Christian and Pagan ideas gave rise to some odd enough results. Browning’s Bishop ordering his tomb in St. Praxed’s Church was a genuine type. The old pagan is muttering his death-bed wishes to the sons who ought never to have been his. His sick fancy is full of a strange mingling of Christianity and heathenism, incongruous to any mind but that of a sixteenth-century Humanist.

“The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
St. Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph’s last garment off,
And Moses with the Tables. . . .

And have I not St. Praxed’s ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
—That’s if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully’s every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf’s second line—
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!

—Aha, *ELUCESCEBAT* quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!”

Scripture texts jostle against hearty curses on his ancient rival; scraps of old sermons mingle with expressions of anxiety about

the Saints and Nymphs and Fauns on his tombstone; murmurs of repentance for his sins are choked off with a chuckle over his old rival's dubious Latinity. There is something almost innocent about the old heathen of a Bishop, so charmingly unconscious is he of any incongruities in the religion which he has gradually evolved for himself from the Church and the classics. It was reported that Marsiglio Ficino kept two candles burning in his study, one before the statue of the Virgin Mary, the other before the bust of Plato. If the story is not true, it might well have been. Erasmus was by no means insensible to the pagan complexion which the Humanist spirit was assuming, and wrote with unmistakable sincerity against it, for he was a genuine believer in the religion which he professed. But he himself gave a fine and touching illustration of the true and legitimate influence of pagan virtue on a Christian mind, when he declared that, on reading Plato's account of the last moments of Socrates, he was tempted to say, *Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis!*

The accomplished and cultivated princes of the Church shared in the Humanists' distaste for the accepted theologies, and regarded with graceful indifference the unscholarly tribe which endeavored to point out to them that they were letting Christianity go by the board. But the men to whom the scholastic theology was the breath of life, and Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas the oracles of truth, saw with perfect clearness the tendency of the Humanist movement, and raged against it in a mingling of fear and fanaticism. They directed their attacks, however, upon the wrong point of the enemy's works. They saw that the Humanist movement was permeated with paganism, and we may not deny that they did well to be angry. But they sought to correct this tendency, not by going back to the fountain-heads of Christianity—the Scriptures and the Fathers—but by fulminating against learning, and pointing out the paganism of some of the Humanists as a direct and necessary result of their devotion to the classics. To study Greek was heresy in their eyes; to polish up one's Latin was a sign of perilous liberalism. If the superior clergy as a class were indulgent to the Humanists, or were even numbered in their ranks, the inferior clergy

were not; and, above all, the monks set their faces against learning as a direct cause of heretical pravity. The three great mendicant orders—Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians—were the most conspicuous in this crusade, and they were formidable enemies. Pope Alexander VI said that he would rather risk offending a sovereign prince than the meanest mendicant friar. These orders had become the very bane of the Church. They were exempt from episcopal jurisdiction, and went where they pleased. They invaded the cures of the parochial clergy, and took possession of the pulpits and the confessionals. They were ever on the alert for signs of heresy. They were steeped in ignorance, not even understanding the barbarous Latin which they were taught by rote, and quite determined, as in the old story, to keep their own *mumpsimus* against anybody else's *sumpsimus*. As to their morals, the less said the better, but the later mediæval writers are unanimous on the subject. But their power over the lower classes was enormous, and they were responsible only to their own respective superiors, who in their turn were responsible only to the Pope.

These were the people who entered the lists against the champions of learning, and upon these enemies Erasmus fell with all the weapons of his wit, his satire and his scorn. In his *Adagia* he collects all the stories against the monks that he can find, tells them with the utmost gusto, and flavors them with his own sly and malicious wit. This book, his first important one, attained a circulation almost unparalleled for those days. It was, as Froude well says, light literature,—stories, epigrams, proverbs, with his own interesting, curious and amusing comments upon each. The book was especially popular in England, and Dr. Warham, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, carried his copy about with him wherever he went. But the monks were furious. The lash of Erasmus's wit cut them on the raw. This was nothing, however, to what was to come. Erasmus published his edition of the Greek Testament, with a new Latin translation, and a profusion of notes and comments, showing the enormous contrast between the popular Christianity of the day and Christianity as set forth in the New Testament: between the theology of the Apostles and that of the scholastic divines.

And very nearly at the same time he printed his vitriolic little work, *Encomium Moriae, sive Declamatio in Laudem Stultitiae*. The idea of the book had been suggested to him by Sir Thomas More during Erasmus's second visit to England, and its title was a play on More's name. No book could have contained a more destructive blast of ridicule. It is highly amusing, and is not even lacking in a sort of geniality, but its mockery is as biting and as maddening as Voltaire's. It was directed full upon the monks and friars, and left them a raging wreck of confusion. Perhaps no book ever produced a greater explosion of panic-stricken wrath and fury. The monks shrieked, and their adherents raved. Universities forbade their students to read Erasmus's works. An Oxford divine preached a series of Lenten sermons denouncing the study of the classics, and pointing out Erasmus as an awful example of the pernicious results of such studies. Unluckily for this reverend person, Sir Thomas More, Erasmus's greatest friend, was at this time Chancellor of the University, and he wrote the divine a stinging letter in which he remarked sententiously that a fool's speech proceeded out of a fool's head, and that the Lenten preacher had better discourse about sin, with which he might be presumed to be acquainted, than about Latin, of which he knew little; science, of which he knew less; and Greek, of which he knew nothing. A society called Trojans was formed at Oxford for the express purpose of attacking and repressing Greek studies. The monks shouted that Erasmus was undoubtedly Antichrist, and that the stake was only too good for him. But Erasmus was perfectly safe. He had as a protector the head of the Church himself,—the magnificent Leo X. The Pope may not have cared much about religion, but he cared a great deal about learning, and the greatest man of letters in Europe was tranquilly safe under his shadow. The monks demanded that the Pope should read and condemn the *Encomium Moriae*. He did read it, and with great amusement, and his only comment was a hearty laugh, and the remark: "Our old friend Erasmus again!" Leo despised the monks, although he made use of them. He had no idea of condemning a book which he knew to be a well-deserved castigation, and probably he shared in the

profound satisfaction with which the book was received not only by the educated laity, but by the secular clergy as well, who were tired of the arrogance and insolence of the monastic orders. And his reply to the demands of the monks for the punishment of their castigator was to accept the dedication of Erasmus's edition of St. Jerome, and to write to Henry VIII recommending Erasmus for an English bishopric.

Another controversy at about this time almost involved Erasmus in its toils. Johann Reuchlin, who had done more than anyone else to introduce and spread the study of the Hebrew language among German scholars, was now to become the target of an attack which had memorable consequences for the reactionaries. One of the Cologne Dominicans, Johann Pfefferkorn, a converted Jew, with all the convert's furious zeal, a forehead of brass, and an armor of self-conceit which only one weapon could penetrate, managed to raise a Jew-baiting cry in connection with Reuchlin's Hebrew teaching, and appealed to the Inquisition for a decree that all Hebrew literature except the Scriptures should be sought out and destroyed. At this voice from the Dark Ages Erasmus lost all patience; or, to put it more accurately, he was furiously angry, and dismissing all his customary moderation, he raged as a Dominican himself might have done. He calls Pfefferkorn that pestilent trumpeter of the Furies, the vicar of Satan, that vile monster, a venomous wretch whose very name would sully decent paper. But Erasmus was saved the trouble of punishing Pfefferkorn by Ulric von Hutten and some of the graceless youngsters in his train. That strange creature—soldier, scholar and scapegrace—wrote in conjunction with his friends a book of imaginary letters which, in imitation of Reuchlin's *Clarorum Virorum Epistolae*, they called *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*. This Rabelaisian production purported to be mainly a batch of letters written to Ortwin Graes, or Grätius, the head of the Dominicans in Cologne, by various people, among them Pfefferkorn, Hochstradt the Inquisitor, and other well-known enemies of Reuchlin, names being used in the most reckless fashion, and the luckless victims being made to accuse themselves of all manner of ignorance, immorality, stupidity and absurdity; and the letters were written in

a Latin which fairly wagged its tail. The book was received all over Europe with shouts of laughter. It was extremely coarse, and as witty as it was coarse. Pfefferkorn and his crew were dumbfounded, and became spectacles of helpless wrath and confusion, for of course any attempt to reply to such a book would have made them more ridiculous than the book itself had made them. The letters were by common consent immediately ascribed to Erasmus, but he hastened to disown them. A decent priest could not allow such a book to be fathered upon him. He said that he was not squeamish, but that he had no taste for ribaldry. Nevertheless, it was reported that he had shrieked with laughter over the book, which is likely enough. But the *Epistolae* had their effect, and Reuchlin's escape from the hands of the Inquisition was largely due to this audacious piece of fun.

The University of Louvain now proposed to make a formal examination of the works of Erasmus with a view to delating him in due form to the Pope for heresy. Erasmus coolly remarked that in order to make the proposed examination they must first learn some Greek and Latin. The examination was made, however, and point after point was brought before Pope Leo, who placidly decided them all in Erasmus's favor as fast as they were made. The monks, although discomfited, were not silenced; but Erasmus was undisturbed by their clamor. All this tranquillity was broken up, however, and all lesser storms overshadowed and forgotten in the bursting of that mighty tempest called the Reformation.

Reformers may be divided into three classes. First come the Reformers who reform by force, compelling those over whom they can manage to secure power to do as the Reformers think they ought to do. This is the theory of the Inquisition, and of the modern Moral Reformer. The second class embraces those who seek to reform by persuading and convincing their fellows of the rightfulness and reasonableness of the courses which they recommend. In this group are found the majority of the sixteenth-century Reformers; partly because their principles required it, and partly because they had not, as a rule, the power to use the first method. The third class—an extremely small one—includes the truest Reformer that the world has

ever seen,—One, indeed, to whom we hesitate to apply a name with so many bad connotations. His method was to purify the springs of human conduct, quite sure that when the vicious quitch of nature was set right, all the evils of human society would correct themselves. But this is what the doctors call constitutional treatment, and it is slow. We sometimes become discontented with our physicians when they seem to neglect distressing symptoms. But the doctor is treating the cause of the symptoms, not the symptoms themselves, and when the cause is removed, the symptoms will disappear. *Causa sublata, tollitur effectus*, as the legal maxim has it. The average Reformer has not the patience to try constitutional treatment. He is disposed to attack symptoms, oblivious of the fact that he is beginning at the wrong end of his problem, and that no permanent good is to be expected from his efforts. But although the Reformers of the sixteenth century usually adopted the second method of reformation to which I have alluded, I fear that in many cases they refrained from using the first only because they had not the power.

“Christians have burnt each other, quite persuaded
That all the Apostles would have done as they did,”—

and I would no more have trusted the Reformers with fagots than I would trust the Prohibitionist or the Sabbatarian with the keys to the jail.

Erasmus Noster, as Sir Thomas More used to call him, is not regarded by either side as one of the heroic figures of the Reformation, and the reason is not far to seek. The general impression about him, derived from common histories of the Reformation, is that he was a trimmer; a somewhat cynical gentleman who proposed to save his own skin, come what might; a laborer who put his hand to the plough and then turned back; a loud-voiced leader who, when other men started to do the work which he had pointed out as necessary, suddenly ceased his trumpet-calls, and scurried away to a place of safety. This view is intimately bound up with a serious mistake continually made by superficial students of the Reformation: the assumption, namely, that the participants in that great battle were divided into two

sharply defined companies, one of which was striving to cleanse the Church from its doctrinal and practical corruptions, and bring back the Gospel to its primitive purity; the other obstinately resisting every effort at a change, and in blind and deadly fanaticism clinging to all the corruptions against which the others were battling. Such was by no means the case. The Catholics contended, indeed, that doctrines formally defined by the Church were fixed and irreformable, but corruptions of practice and morals were readily admitted to exist, and the best men in the Church were not only willing but anxious to aid in reforming them. As a matter of fact, many efforts had been made to effect such reformatations, and not without some success. The Council of Basle was a reforming council, and the Council of Trent, although very much of a failure in the sequel, was called for the very purpose, among others, of effecting some much-needed reforms in practice. When Luther burst upon the world with his tremendous attack upon the abuses of the Church, he only voiced the convictions of thousands of faithful Catholics, who, nevertheless, refused to follow him into what they considered schism, but lived and died in communion with Rome. To reform abuses was one thing in their eyes: to abandon the Church was quite another thing. Among these was Erasmus. The desire of Erasmus for reform was as great as Luther's, but he had no wish for a revolution. He had been exposing the abuses of the Church long before Luther woke up from his contented slumber in an Augustinian convent. He had shown the corruptions of the monastic orders, the deplorable ignorance of the lower ecclesiastics, and the distortion of the original deposit of faith, and he had even dared to speak frankly on the degeneracy of the papacy itself. But the Church was now all aflame, set on fire by that human thunderbolt, Martin Luther. All men, and especially all ecclesiastics, were called upon to take sides in the struggle. Erasmus was full of vexation and chagrin. The fastidious man of letters was disgusted with the plebeian violence of the monk of Erfurt. Such fire and fury were repugnant to all the mental habits of the refined scholar. He knew that Luther was right in his earlier contentions, although he feebly demurred to his bellowing in bad Latin. He knew that the sale of the

Indulgences was all wrong in theology as in practice. He knew even better than Luther did what the monastic orders were, and what the Roman Curia was. And now Luther claimed him. He wrote to Erasmus and begged for his help. Erasmus refused it. He saw nothing as the end of all this violence but a disastrous schism in the Church, and when Luther went on to found a new church, and to formulate a new theological system, Erasmus despairingly saw a schism made permanent. He tried his best to avoid taking sides. Luther entreated him to espouse his cause, since he had been the foremost man in the Church in calling attention to the abuses against which Luther was thundering. This was true, and Erasmus's New Testament had done more than anything else to put into the hands of educated men the proofs of many of Luther's assertions. Erasmus's enemies in the Church saw this quite as clearly as Luther did. They elegantly said that Erasmus had laid the egg which Luther hatched, although Erasmus retorted that the egg was merely that of a harmless domestic hen, from which Luther had hatched a gamecock. On the other hand, the Catholics were as insistent that he should come out flatly as Luther's opponent, since Erasmus had declared—and kept his word—that he would never separate himself from the communion of the See of Rome. He did come out in a half-hearted way with an attack on the Lutheran doctrine as to the freedom of the will, but neither his treatise nor Luther's reply to it played any real part in the contest. Erasmus was angered and alarmed. His old enemies, the monks, were still active and ferocious, and were clamoring for his punishment as a heretic. There can be little doubt that he was in real peril after the death of Leo X. Erasmus was not of the stuff of which martyrs are made, and said so frankly. If the worst came to the worst, he would recant, although he might have died of shame afterwards. Luther would have gone to the stake, if needful, with the undaunted courage of one who feared neither men nor devils: not so Erasmus. Perhaps he does not cut a particularly heroic figure; it is not given to every man to do that. To his sane and steady vision, however, these questions over which men were wrangling so fiercely were not so incapable of settlement by argument and reason and compromise

as to call any man to go to fiery death for one particular view of them.

Promises were not wanting, as well as threats. Erasmus's old schoolfellow, Adrian VI, the successor of Leo X, wrote to him twice, asking him to come to Rome and help him, adding in both letters the significant assurance that he would not regret having accepted the invitation. Erasmus knew what that meant. It meant a red hat, ample means, and the run of the great Roman libraries. But it also meant working in harness for the rest of his life, as a controversial hack. He refused the Pope's invitation. But he was now in a most perplexing position, and his most prominent feeling with regard to it was resentment. The time was out of joint, but he did not in the least feel that he was born to set it right. Why could he not be let alone, to pursue his studies and write his books? But he had cut himself off from the right or the power to expect this, for he knew perfectly well that he had been engaged in undermining the huge structure of the undivided Western Church, and that, although Luther had given the push which sent it thundering down, Erasmus had prepared the way; and like the magician in the story, he had evoked a spirit which he had no way of laying. Perplexity succeeded to perplexity. He could not and would not deny what Luther had said about the corruptions and abuses of the Church, for he had said the same. He shuddered at the idea of allying himself with the monks whom he so despised. The scholar-training came to his aid. By that very training he had been taught to think sanely and soberly. Fanaticism was abhorrent to his broad and cultivated intellect. Such men always seem timid and compromising and shifty to the leaders of violent factions. And even what I have called the paganism of the Humanist school came to his aid. Erasmus was no hypocrite. He was a genuine believer in the Christianity of the New Testament and the Fathers, and a devoted adherent of the old Church, but his belief was tempered with the conviction that life, and not doctrine, conduct not theology, was the essence of true Christianity, a system of which the Apostles' Creed was the rule of faith, and the Sermon on the Mount the rule of living. And thus this Humanist stands well-nigh alone in this great

strife of tongues which has not yet ceased. Listen to the calm words of this sane and wise scholar, taken from various letters from 1530 onwards:—

“Luther’s party has urged me to join him, and Luther’s enemies have done their best to drive me to it by their furious attacks on me. Neither has succeeded. Christ I know: Luther I know not. The Roman Church I know, and death will not part me from it, unless the Church departs from Christ.”

“All admit that the corruptions of the Church required a drastic medicine. But drugs wrongly given make the sick man worse. I regarded Luther as a good man raised up by Providence to correct the depravity of the age. Whence have all these troubles arisen? From the audacious and open immorality of the priesthood, the arrogance of the theologians, and the tyranny of the monks.”

“The first mistake was to neglect Luther’s protest against the Indulgences: the next, when things grew serious, was to appeal to popular clamour, and leave the defence of the Church to monks. Luther’s books were burnt, when they ought to have been read and studied by earnest and serious persons. There was too much haste to persecute; we tolerate Jews and gypsies, we might have borne with Luther. The reformers have torn the images out of the churches. They might have been content to forbid the worship of them. They will have no more priests; they had better strive to have priests of learning and piety. Let those who have no faith in the merits of saints pray to God, imitate Christ in their lives, and let them alone who do believe in saints. Confession is an ancient custom; let those who doubt that it is a sacrament observe it until the Church can decide. Let men think as they please about Purgatory, without quarrelling with those who do not think as they do. Let theologians argue in the Sorbonne about free-will; laymen need not puzzle themselves about such questions.”

We hear of men who are in advance of their times. Here is one who was so far ahead of his times that mankind has not caught up with him yet. This serene good sense, this trust in the influence of sober thought, this broad tolerance, this profound distrust of radicalism, have not yet commended themselves to the world. Over all that great battle of the sixteenth century, the

echoes of which reverberate about us yet, how like the quiet voice of Reason herself sound the words of our wise Humanist; wise because he was so learned, so trained, so full of the lore of the ages. Nothing is more idle than to conjecture what might have happened if circumstances had been different, but if Erasmus had stayed in Rome in 1504, when Pope Julius II made him such flattering offers, when the Cardinals were so charmed with Erasmus, and he with them, and when they more than hinted that they wanted to keep him among them, then Leo X might have been succeeded by Erasmus of Rotterdam instead of by his old schoolfellow Adrian of Utrecht, and the whole subsequent history of Christendom might have been changed.

Men say that the day of the scholar is over. It may be true that knowledge will always win, in the long run, over ignorance, but it is true only with limitations. When Lavoisier was to be sent to the guillotine, he begged for a respite of a few days in order that he might complete a series of important chemical experiments; whereupon a representative of the Sovereign People loftily replied: "The Republic has no need of chemical experiments". Knowledge is powerless against physical force, and it is powerless in the face of that stupidity against which the very gods war in vain. There has never been a time when the influence of the men of learning was more needed than it is now. To despise the mob is the settled instinct of the pundit caste, but they must remember that this is the day of the mob. Democracy is in full career. The wildest of theories have their noisy advocates around and about us, and have their power and their influence simply because our coming masters, if masters they are to be, are too ignorant to have heard of the past, with all its history of the rise and fall of the crazy schemes of men as ignorant as they. Men of training must strive to put the drag on this wild career by the power of that wise conservatism which they have learned in the schools of knowledge. So may they at least postpone, if they cannot finally avert, the day when Ignorance shall seat herself on the throne of the world,—

"And universal darkness buries all."

FRANK M. GIBSON,

Maryland Diocesan Library.